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Viewing cable 08BEIRUT680, LEBANON: GENERAL RIFI SAYS ISF IS DOING ITS JOB

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08BEIRUT680**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BEIRUT680	2008-05-13 18:14	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11352>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11351>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11627>
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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000680

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK

INL FOR A/S DAVID T. JOHNSON
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/12/2018

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: GENERAL RIFI SAYS ISF IS DOING ITS JOB

REF: A. BEIRUT 641

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 669

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Director General of Internal Security Forces (ISF) General Ashraf Rifi reported on the tensions throughout Lebanon, expressing concern for the fighting in his hometown of Tripoli. He confirmed that the ISF is doing a good job fulfilling its duty of community policing and maintaining law and order. He characterized the relationship between the ISF and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) as "O.K.," commenting on the failure of the LAF to prevent Hizballah from taking over Beirut. Although Beirut International Airport is open for private planes, he cautioned against its use by the Americans. He said the Rene Mouawad/Kleyate airport in the north could be operable for commercial airlines, but that big planes would need to cross Syrian airspace when landing. He added that while the Beirut Port is closed for administrative reasons, the port in Tripoli can service large ships.

[1](#)2. (C) Rifi said no ISF officers were resigning and attributed LAF resignations as symbolic, noting that those officers are still reporting to duty. In appreciation for receiving U.S. assistance, Rifi showed the Charge the ISF's latest magazine which features the ISF graduating class marching in front of the Charge -- an image that angered Hizballah. He also noted that six of the twelve U.S.-funded refurbished armored personnel carriers were deployed in Beirut, including in front of the Ministry of Interior. End summary.

FRUITS OF U.S. ASSISTANCE

[1](#)3. (C) The Charge, accompanied by A/RSO and PolOff, met with Director General of Internal Security Forces (ISF) General Rifi at the ISF headquarters on May 12. He showed the Charge the current edition of the ISF's magazine, which featured on its cover the graduates of a \$60 million INL-funded police cadet training program marching in front of the Charge. This picture of ISF officers honoring the Charge received much criticism from Hizballah. Rifi proudly told the Charge that he was not hesitating to distribute copies of the magazine.

[1](#)4. (C) The Charge remarked to Rifi that we had passed by armored personnel carriers (APCs) in front of the Central Bank and the Ministry of Interior. Rifi reported that six of the twelve refurbished APCs funded by the U.S. (INL) are now deployed.

FIGHTING IN TRIPOLI

[1](#)5. (C) Rifi, who is from Tripoli and has his family there, expressed his concern about the fighting. He said the fighting was between the Alawi residents in Jabal Mohsin and the Sunni/Future Movement area of Bab al-Tabbaneh. He noted that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) had been deployed in northern Tripoli, but that tensions remain.

AND "ORDER" IN BEIRUT;
CONCERNED SUNNI U.S.
CITIZENS

¶6. (C) Noting that the ISF, charged with maintaining law and order, does not have much involvement with controlling Beirut, he assessed that West Beirut is in a "tough" situation now. He alluded to poor Sunni residents in Tariq Jdeideh, and noted to the Charge that the Sunni Lebanese-Americans living in Shia areas appear the most concerned about their safety. Rifi dismissed reports of violence in the Hamra area earlier in the morning, saying it was an isolated incident.

¶7. (C) Rifi said the ISF is conducting regular community

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policing in the Chouf and Aley districts, where there have been clashes between the Druze and Hizballah. He said the situation today requires a military mission, not a policing mission.

AIRPORT AND PORT OPERABILITY

¶8. (C) The road to the Beirut International Airport (BIA) remains closed, Rifi reported, though private planes have been landing and using local roads. He cautioned against the Americans using BIA, even in emergency cases. The Rene Mouawad/Kleyate airport in the north can be used, he suggested, but it would require the bigger planes to fly over Syrian airspace when landing. Nevertheless, he said, the airport and runways are in good condition. The Port is closes, Rifi reported, but only because the workers cannot get to work. He said that the Tripoli port is operational and capable of servicing large ships.

LAF - ISF RELATIONS

¶9. (C) Rifi told the Charge that the working relationship between the ISF and LAF is "O.K." He clarified, "It is not acceptable that the LAF had let Hizballah control Beirut." He believes that the tendered resignations by Sunni LAF officers (Ref A) are a symbolic message to LAF Commander General Sleiman, telling him that the LAF has to protect the Lebanese citizens. Rifi does not believe they intend to actually resign, noting that they are still reporting to work. He added that there have been no ISF resignations.

THE WAY FORWARD

¶10. (C) Now, we are just hoping for a political consensus, Rifi said. If not, he continued, the situation will become worse. He added that every political faction has been preparing for civil war by arming itself, citing the Sunnis in the north as an example: "They are preparing and they are not afraid of Hizballah." If Hizballah enters Christian areas, Rifi predicted, it will embarrass Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun. It would be a delicate situation, Rifi continued, saying that he could not guess how Aoun would react.

¶11. (C) He believed some Christians have been asking Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea to supply them. (Note: We saw Rifi later in the afternoon at his close friend Saad Hariri's residence, and Geagea reported to us that he had also met with Rifi on May 12 to request Rifi's assistance in buying ammunition from other countries, Ref B. End note.)

¶12. (C) Rifi expressed his concern that the Palestinian refugees could enter the conflict to join their fellow Sunnis, nothing that Mrs. Bahia Hariri (former PM Rafiq Hariri's sister) has been providing social services to the refugees from Ein el Hilwah camp.
SISON